1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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County Clare

571 they received their nicknames were of other sorts. Not even
517 farming occupied a large share of their conversation, keen as their rivalry in the matter often was while work was going on.

571 Taking these matters in order, the young men who met
517 at Roche's house met habitually there for card playing.
524 Roche's unmarried son, a man about thirty, was perhaps the central figure. His cousin, another Roche, was the brother of a young man just married, who took part in no *cuaird*. This cousin helped work his brother's farm. He was another central figure. The group that formed itself round them included most of the young men of Rynamona between the ages of twenty and thirty. They played the usual games of the Irish countryside, "forty-five" and "nap," often far into the night.

571 Roche's house was the more informal center. It took in
517 the younger men. But there was present in the community
525 a custom somewhat more organized, namely, the "gamble." As often as once a week a gamble is held in or near Rynamona. Each household, as its turn comes, throws open its doors to the card players. Admission, usually a shilling, is charged and goes toward defraying the expense of the supper of bread and tea for all and toward the prize. What is left after those charges are met belongs to the householder. Often this amount reaches a profitable figure, and, where the custom is firmly entrenched, a certain commercialism shows its head.

But the gamble is a sporting event. Teams, often formed of habitual associates in card playing, are pitted against one another in one form of the gamble. In another, individual high scorers win. The prize is usually a turkey or two geese, even a bonham (young pig), a side of bacon, or a calf. Elab-
[555] orate rules and canons of honesty govern the play, the conduct of the players, and the obligation of the person offering the prize. Play is serious and intense, and the win-

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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517 sea-strand, hurley, horse-racing and games have drawn
526 together large crowds at certain seasons of the year, and in summer there were also boat or curragh races. These have by no means lost their appeal: one may instance the gatherings at Omey Island, Co. Mayo. If bull-baiting, doubtless a relic of ceremonial bull-fights, is now dead, cock-fighting is still secretly indulged in, while the illegal "long bullets,"[1] played with a heavy ball along the roads of Co. Armagh and Co. Cork—a curious distribution, for I have not come across it elsewhere—is still popular, and though Wakefield seems to attribute it to English influence it recalls the skill of the Irish peasantry in stone-throwing. This was, legend tells us, one of the playful habits of the giants of old, and a phrase used of the Aran Islands—"quarrels usually end in stone-throwing"—would not be inapplicable to some Irish cities during the "troubles." In the Claddagh of Galway a favourite amusement, turned at times into its original use as "a mode of warfare," used to be casting stones with slings. "When a man was able to strike a shilling as far away as it could be seen, he was considered a good shot." O'Curry states that it was the custom of the ancient Irish to use a flat circular stone in warfare: it was carried in the hollow of the shield.

526 Games which have kept their seasonal character are still played at Hallowe'en, especially that known as "diving for apples." "Riding and shoeing the wooden mare" is perhaps no longer played, but we must repeat that it is rarely safe to speak of old customs as extinct in rural Ireland. It has more than once been my experience to come across habits and beliefs which were described as dead half a century ago. Certain
534 toys should also find a place in this brief summary: there is,
524 for instance, the "bull-roarer," a thin lath of wood with serrated edges which is swung round on a string so as to

[1] An interesting account of bullet throwing is given by Michael J. Murphy in *At Slieve Gullion's Foot*, 1941, p. 78. Both iron and stone bullets were home-made, and the writer describes how the latter were fashioned in "bullet-holes" resembling the ancient cup-marks mentioned above on p. 164. The game was also played round Dunleer, Co. Louth, fifty years ago, but in the Cork style, that is by overhand "bowling."

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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produce a buzzing noise. The toy is known in Co. Carlow as a "whee-doodle" and in Co. Down, where it seems formerly to have been regarded as a "sacred" thing, as a "boomer." Professor Haddou has described specimens from Co. Antrim and Co. Cork. About the Co. Carlow example in the Dublin Museum Dr. Raftery provides me with the following note. "A boy was whirling it around and an old man who saw him was very angry and told him to take the thing home and burn it, as otherwise he would bring bad luck on the countryside." This was in 1921. I illustrate a "bull-roarer" from Cape Clear, Co. Cork (Fig. 113). Its Irish name is Cláirín Búirthe.

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Fig. 113.

It is, of course, possible that some Irish localities may have learnt the use of this toy from stray specimens brought home from regions where it is still in regular ceremonial use, but when we remember all the other Irish survivals we cannot doubt that the bull-roarer is a relic of the past that has lost, or nearly lost, its sacred character. The bull-roarer has an almost world-wide distribution. It is said to have been employed in ancient Greece in connexion with the Dionysiac mysteries. We can imagine its employment in the initiation rites and magical practices of pagan times so picturesquely reconstructed by Professor Macalister in his book "Ancient Ireland." In various parts of the modern world the bull-roarer is used as a rain charm, in raising a wind or producing thunder, in driving game, herding cattle (*cf.* Chapter 6) or preparing for fishing, in rites of initiation and circumcision, in funeral festivities and mask dances: it is a general rule that the instrument must not be seen by women or children on pain of death. In the words of Haddon: "This insignificant toy is perhaps the most ancient, widely spread and sacred religious symbol in the world."

Of great antiquity and wide distribution, the spear-thrower is another instrument which appears to have survived in Ireland as a toy, used as a throwing stick in boys' games. And another toy "not yet connected with any ceremonial usage" but paralleled among the Chinese and the North

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9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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171 American Indians is the buzz, a rectangular piece of wood or a
524 circular disc of metal which is rotated on a twisted string, by drawing the hands apart, to produce a buzzing sound. It is recorded that the young weavers of 19th century Belfast were fond of playing with the "bummer," and I saw the toy, called a "snorer," in use in north-east Antrim this summer.

857 Many examples could be given of children's games and
524 rhymes which retain memories of ancient rites. Thus it has been suggested that the game known as "Draw a pail of water" is "the attenuated survival of the religious rite of water worship." Similarly there are hints of foundation sacrifice in "the Devil's Bridge," of marriage by capture in "Nuts in May," of marriage by purchase in "Lords from Spain" and of funeral rites in "Jeannie Jo" and "Green Gravel." These games are not necessarily long established in Ireland—some of them were probably introduced by planters, as in the Appalachian region of the U.S.A.—but they are of wide occurrence and considerable age in other parts of Europe.
754 It is worth putting on record that the aid of magic is still sought in causing illness by making and injuring a wax model of someone to whom ill is wished. It is not five years since a case which resulted in death occurred within a short distance
789 of Belfast. I have no doubt that instances of curious love
821 charms, of raising a wind and so on could still be found, though the old method of burying a black hen alive to bring a fair wind is probably forgotten. The so-called "protective formulæ" such as "God bless the work" and "I wish you luck of the baste" are common currency.

241 Harvest customs that deserve mention are the cutting
289 of the last sheaf and the wearing of harvest knots. In the north of Ireland, as in many other parts of Europe, it was customary, so long as sickles were the reaping tools—the practice became modified with the use of scythes—for the harvesters to fling their hooks at the last plaited remnant of standing corn. This was known under various names such as neck, churn, hare, granny, carline and cailleach or "collya."

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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342 to a round-ended house. But there are many missing links in the evolution of the Irish house, which archaeological excavation will hope to find some day. Interpretative studies of Dark-Age texts are also needed.[1]

342 Clues to old methods of house building may also be found in
524 forms of construction used for outbuildings or in children's
787 games. There is, for example, a Hallowe'en spell or divination game known as 'building the house' in which twelve couples of holly twigs are arranged in a circle, pushed into the ground and tied together at the apex. A live turf representing the fire is placed in the centre. The coupled twigs are named after the boys and girls present, and the pair which first catches fire indicates which boy and girl will first be coupled in marriage.[2] Compare with this a description of Irish houses in the early seventeenth century: 'the baser cottages are built of underwood, called wattles, and covered with thatch . . . of a round form and without chimneys, and in my imagination resemble so many hives of bees about a country farm.'[3]

342 Today nearly all Irish farm-houses are a simple rectangle in ground plan, anything from ten to twenty feet in width and of varying length according to the number of rooms they comprise, each room being the full width of the house. The normal developed house has three rooms, consisting of a central kitchen with a bedroom at the bottom end and another—the best room, called simply 'the room'—behind the chimney, which helps to warm it (Fig. 8). This, in the Gaeltacht, is the 'west room', reserved for family mementoes, for the old people and especially for the dead. Here the body is placed during wakes, and a wealth of superstition gathers around this room.[4] Arensberg may have been mistaken in translating the Gaelic *iarthar* as 'west', for the word also means 'back', but there are old beliefs about the orientation of the dwelling house, and it is possible that there was an association between death and the direction of the setting sun. The confusion between 'west' and 'back' is amusingly illustrated in the story of the Irish boy who,

[1] Angus Graham, 'Archaeological Gleanings from Dark Age Records', *P.S.A. Scot.* (1950–51), 64–91.

[2] Lady Wilde, *Ancient Legends of Ireland* (1888), 111.

[3] Luke Gernon, *A Discourse of Ireland, Anno 1620.*

[4] C. M. Arensberg, *The Irish Countryman* (1937), Ch. 1.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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285 415 ancient origin. We shall see that it is the way the Boyne curraghs are built, and it is said that the African pygmies make their carrying baskets in similar fashion. For lightness and to facilitate lifting one or more rows of open 'windows' are left in the sides of the creels. Those used for seaweed were sometimes quite open in construction, and like the manure pots they were generally fitted with hinged bottoms for unloading (Fig. 56).

301 524 285 [832] Besides their utilitarian uses, rushes, grasses and straw have long been playthings for young folk who fashion out of them, for love or for luck, many varieties of decorations and emblems. We describe the Briget's Crosses elsewhere (Fig. 85). Harvest knots, twisted out of the ripe straw of harvest, seem formerly to have been in truth love tokens, though now worn merely as buttonholes for the harvest fair (Plate 13). As one might expect, the girls' knots were the more ornate and they differed from those worn by the boys in having the ears left attached. Some exceptionally fine specimens are fashioned out of flax or fine wild grasses. Star-shaped emblems in these materials are also made (Fig. 70). More complicated knots have four or six strand work, but the ordinary knots are in two ply, made by bending the straws sharply over each other at right angles. Before being knotted they make tolerably strong cords: I have experimented with these on unbaked clay pots and find that when impressed in the soft clay they make very good imitations of the 'cord impressions' seen on Bronze Age pottery. I have heard that in Nigeria the same two-ply technique is employed in making roulettes, from the fibres of the wine palm, for decorating the native pottery. Among the many toys and playthings made of rushes we find baskets for wild strawberries and blaeberries, rattles, butterfly cages, fishing nets, caps, bracelets, belts, hatbands, mock-ceremonial whips, canes and swords and imitation birds' feet and flowers, some of which are shown in Fig. 70. Many of them are associated with particular occasions of the year, for example the imitation flowers with Easter and the blaeberry baskets with Garland Sunday (Chapter XIX) but in general they are the products of the infinite leisure of long summer days of cattle-tending in field, bog or mountain. Probably a number of these objects once had a practical value

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 [text continues on p. 210]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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FIG. 70. Rush, grass and straw-work. (1) Cuckoo pint made of rushes, Co. Armagh. (2) Butterfly cage of rushes, Co. Down. (3) Rush bracelet in nine-strand plait, Co. Armagh. (4) 'Hen's claw' of grass, Co. Mayo. (5) 'Briget's rag' of oat straw. Tory Island charm. (6) 'Harvest star' of flax, Co. Antrim. (7) Rush rattle, Co. Mayo. (8) Blaeberry basket of rushes, Co. Down. (9) Harvest knot of flax, Co. Armagh.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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and others were ceremonial; some may be no more than simple pastimes prompted by fancy. Rush baskets were in fact made until recently in some of the Hebridean islands for carrying the fishermen's bait and for holding fish. Baskets of birch twigs, dock stems, ragwort and thistles have also been recorded, and it should be recalled that several examples of grass, sedge, and even moss, made in a similar cross-twisted technique have been recorded from Bronze Age burials in Scotland. The cone-shaped hat of rushes or straw made by children (Fig. 86) recalls in shape at least the traditional headdress of the leprechauns, and it may be noticed that tall steeple hats and helmets seem to have been popular among the Irish down to the seventeenth century.[1] In Co. Kerry the rush hats are worn in mock fights and seem to be regarded as helmets.

Of all these rush toys, none is stranger than the butterfly cage (Fig. 70) which is deftly made by bending long rushes, held upright between the fingers, over others placed transversely. One side of the cage may be left open and a dock leaf inserted as a door. The ends of the rushes are bound together to make a handle. This pastoral plaything can be paralleled in many parts of the world: in the cages in which Spanish shepherd boys carry insects, in the little baskets of dried grass which the Indian herd children make for grasshoppers, in the locust traps which Greek boys, Theocritus tells us, used to weave out of asphodel stalks, and even among the nomads of the Gobi Desert, where, when the cicada begins to call in the great heat, 'every child cuts the desert grass to make a tiny cage to hold one of the fascinating tree-hoppers . . . The Gobi baby's rattle, too, is a hollow ball of twisted grass enclosing a large bead.'[2] The Irish rush rattle is provided with two hazel nuts. Some of the leaves and bracelets are plaited with four, six, nine, or even twelve strands, and a nine strand plait is also seen in one variety of three-cornered Briget's Cross (Fig. 85, 3; Pl. 13, 7).

The conical straw masks and the capes worn by strawboys (Chapter XX, Fig. 88) stripped of their gay ribbons, have been compared with the straw dresses of peasants in Spain or China, and, no doubt, they had their practical prototypes in Ireland.

[1] H. F. McClintock, *Old Irish and Highland Dress*, 88.
[2] M. Cable and F. French, *The Gobi Desert*, 100.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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The straw cape placed over the bee-skep (Fig. 69) is a humble relation. Straw masks are worn also by Biddy Boys on St. Briget's Eve, and by the Christmas Rhymers. On St. Briget's Eve, too, a small straw doll (Brideóg) was dressed up and carried from door to door in the south-west of Ireland. A charm of plaited straw known as Bratóg Brighde (literally, Briget's Rag) is carried by the fishermen of Tory Island as a protection against storms (Fig. 70, 5). There was also Briget's Girdle, a two-strand straw rope, a circle with crosses attached, which was passed over the body as a protective charm, by inserting one leg and then pushing the head through on the Saints' Feast Day (Fig. 85).

Before the Irish live-cattle trade developed there had been for some centuries a great export of hides and skins, and if one goes back earlier it becomes clear that these products must have found a multitude of uses about the farm. For a number of purposes where toughness and durability are specially needed animal skin has remained a traditional material, and in old-fashioned mountainy areas the countryman makes a habit of curing the skins of wild and domesticated animals on the principle that 'you never know but what they'll come in useful'. On analogy with the Hebrides, with which Donegal in particular shows close cultural affinities, skin mealbags should have had a place in cottage economy in north Ireland. When grinding corn, a skin was laid on the floor under the quern to catch the meal. Seal skin served many purposes, from plough traces, in Harris, to the covers of curraghs in Donegal. We have descriptions of cured sheepskins serving as windows,[1] and (from St. Kilda) of fowling ropes bound with strips of salted cowhide to prevent them from being cut by the rocks.[2] But it is in the skin tray, the wecht or wight, that one is most likely to see tradition maintained (Fig. 71). The well-scraped skin of sheep, or sometimes of goat, is stitched on to a rim of ash, bog fir or, in the naked islands which have exhausted even their bog timber, a ring of sugan. To secure the skin free of wrinkles is skilled work, and the finished product is not unlike a tambourine: in fact, it closely resembles the Eskimo caribou drum. Irish wrenboys

[1] Lord George Hill, *Gweedore*, 25.
[2] Martin Martin, *The Western Isles*, 315.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

538 539 or Sean O'Sullivan's recent *Folktales of Ireland*. But a further word must be said of the tales recited by the *seanchai*. Popular among local legends are those dealing with such topics as the famine, evictions and other excesses of past landlords, visits to the island by the Black and Tans seeking political refugees, shipwrecks, and tragedies at sea among fishermen. Stories of the supernatural center around the actions of fairies, the pookah and banshee, those with the evil eye, phantom ships, mermaids and sea demons, and material objects possessing human attributes and 538 volitions. These local legends sometimes qualify as anecdotes, and it is humorous 522 anecdotes which the folk refer to as jokes. Outsiders—such as returned Yanks— [177] are responsible for introducing true jokes, but often these are not told and soon are forgotten, especially if they are "dirty jokes." There is no indigenous dirty joking tradition because of sexual puritanism. I have heard men use various verbal devices—innuendos, puns, and asides—that they believed bear sexual connotations; [123] relatively speaking, they are pallid. In the song that I composed, one line of a [832] verse refers to an islander who arose late on the morning of the shipwreck after "dreaming perhaps of a beautiful mate;" this is regarded as a highly suggestive phrase, and I have seen it redden cheeks and lower glances in a pub.

538 [221] [178] [524] [561] [562] Storytelling in the past took place mostly between the last week of October and early January, when inclement weather forced a slackening of the fishing regime, and the Christmas season kept people in and near their homes. Nowadays, card playing almost nightly during November and part of December by many of the men has become a substitute activity, which excludes the participation of women and children who once composed a part of the audience addressed by the storyteller. At any one time during this period, several groups met to hear Inis 538 573 Beag narrators, a *scealai* or *seanchai* might be visited by a group and serve as host, or he might be invited into or visit on his own another household, and word of his presence would quickly draw an audience. The session lasted from eight or nine o'clock until midnight, and a tale might be so long that its telling occupied an entire evening, or even two or three consecutive nights. After completing a brief narrative, the storyteller might call on a colleague in the audience to recite a sequel, or the hearers might request that he continue or urge another to contribute a tale.

[857] [562] The average sized audience was composed of a dozen persons, although as many as 20 might attend a session. Small children seldom were allowed in the room unless they were members of the family of the host, nor were women of another household; the children were admonished to sit quietly and not to talk or whisper, and the women knitted or crocheted while listening. Seated in a semi-circle around the hearth, the hearers were faced by the narrator who was seated [574] on the right side of the fireplace, and the wife of the host on the left. Refreshments never were served, but a clay pipe was passed around among the men and very old women. The host furnished pipe and tobacco, and the pipe was passed back to him by each person in turn after being puffed on for several minutes. Only if the story was a long one was the pipe proffered by the host to the narrator from time to time.

538 561 [868] Most storytellers were men past the age of 60 years, but some were between 40 and 60 and a few even younger. An old narrator of reputation often called on a young man to recite in order to give him practice, if he felt that the

17: Messenger E-4,5 (1958-1966)1971 ER6 Rural Irish ER6

later on, particularly in those families where competition for the inheritance of property is engendered among siblings by the fathers' attempts to ensure favored treatment in old age.

Men are far more active socially than are women. The latter are restricted by custom mostly to visiting, attending parties during the winter, and participating in church-associated activities. Many women leave their cottages only to attend mass, wakes, and funerals or to make infrequent calls on relatives; my wife and I talked with some elderly women who had not visited other villages or walked to the back of the island for thirty or more years. Men not only attend parties with their womenfolk but go to dances during the summer, frequent the pubs, play cards almost nightly during November and December (the period when once people congregated to hear storytellers), visit the homes of kin and friends or meet along the trails at night, and range the entire island and the sea about it in their economic pursuits. Before the age of benevolent government, women shared many economic tasks with men, such as collecting seaweed, baiting lines, and gutting fish. But now they tend to household chores and only milk cows and perform some of the lighter farming jobs with their fathers and husbands.

The island folk are devout Catholics, despite the fact that they are critical of their priests and hold pagan religious beliefs. Youth of Inis Beag overtly disallow the existence of other than church-approved supernatural entities. However, their elders cling to traditional pagan beliefs and practices (many of which are Druidic in origin) about which they are extremely secretive for fear of being ridiculed by outsiders and their more skeptical neighbors. The non-Christian array of spiritual beings includes various spirits and demons, ghosts, witches, phantom ships, and animals and material objects possessing human attributes and volitions. Prominent among the spirits thought to inhabit Inis Beag are the trooping and solitary fairies, sea creatures, mermaids, and the banshee. The most formidable of the demons is a pooka which lives in a Bronze Age burial mound and roams the strand and common land at night altering its shape and size at will; during the day it will twist the limbs of unwary persons who choose the hill for a resting place. Ghosts, called "shades," are frequently seen after dark performing economic tasks. They are thought to be doing penance in purgatory, which embraces the earth as well as a spiritual locus; this is one example of the many reinterpretations of Christian and pagan belief effected by the islanders. The only form of witchcraft practiced today is the casting of the evil eye. At least three persons, suitably ostracized, are believed to be able to perpetrate evil